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Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi. *Datini, Majorque et le Maghreb (14e-15e siècles) Réseaux, espaces méditerranéens et stratégies marchandes.* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2013. xxx + 694 pp. $282.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-23289-1.

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The Mediterranean Networks of the Late-Medieval Datini Company: A Review of Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi's Recent Study

In this 2013 study based on a 2010 dissertation from the European University Institute, Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi uses informal social networks as an economic analytical tool to understand long-distance exchange in the medieval Mediterranean, specifically in relation to the trading companies of Francesco di Marco Datini, one of the most successful merchants of his time. She explains that this analytical framework allows her to bring to light the reliance of this commercial world on an organization built on informal ties and reciprocal trust. The author compares networks of different scales–local, regional, and international–to understand how they interacted and functioned.

As Michienzi explains, the Datini archives and company have been the object of numerous studies. This particular study is innovative for its focus on the networks that gave Datini access to the markets of North Africa, despite the numerous prohibitions that blocked Florence from directly trading in the Maghrib. The merchant letters that serve as the basis of this study offer a valuable source for delineating the individual members of these networks as well as outlining the strategies involved and the personal initiative essential for creating and maintaining such an intricate structure.

Chapter 1 explores the various ties that bound the Datini company, the kinship strategies employed (marriage, extended families), as well as the role of common or shared identity in creating trust for agents. Particularly interesting are efforts made to compensate for Francesco Datini's lack of family ties, as well as the use of merchant letters as a means of enforcement. The author alludes to the difficulties of maintaining trust and control over agents dispersed over so wide a field.

Michienzi begins chapter 2 by explaining the innovative analysis to come, namely by examining how Datini chose his employees and describing their qualities and qualifications, looking both at the individuals involved and the strengths and weaknesses of such a system. Unfortunately, much space is spent explaining generalities–for example, the fact that merchants trained, apprenticed, traveled, and were promoted based on competence–without much detail directly related to the Datini companies. Footnotes refer to specific letters, but these are rarely brought into the text itself (this is the case throughout the book). Michienzi concludes chapter 2 with the fact that, unlike merchants from Pisa or Venice, Datini's companies were limited in their maritime possibilities, restricted from access to the Maghrib, and reliant on the essential trading hub of Majorca.

Chapter 3 addresses the importance of nations in the organization of long-distance trade. Michienzi makes ample comparisons with medieval universities and the coercive role mercantile nations played as social and political filters between home and host countries. The establishment of national groups as a trading practice is generously treated, as are other basic aspects of medieval Mediterranean trade, including *funduqs*, treaties, and consuls. Florence, however, maintained no diplomatic presence in the lands in question during Datini's lifetime, its merchants having to rely on Pisan, Genoese, or sometimes Venetian institutions. The chapter concludes, again, with the idea that these restrictions forced Datini into creating a network of intermediaries that could connect his Tuscan companies with the markets of North Africa.

Michienzi concentrates on trade practices with the Maghrib in chapter 4. The chapter presents a number of basic concepts, such as the dominance of dinars in the region, before proceeding to the importance of the textile trade. Although European wools were considered superior, Maghribi wools were still useful, and other products, especially leathers and dyes, were imported to fuel Euro-

pean production, transiting first through Majorca. The use of Jewish and Berber intermediaries for both sub-Saharan and North African trade is briefly addressed, although in-depth treatment is relegated to the second half of the book, where the author intends to "present the characteristics of the Datini company's 'Maghribi' network, composed of a great variety of operators acting on different levels" (p. 236).

Part 2 begins with an analysis of the Florentine networks abroad. Chapter 5 explores the informal ties that bound the Tuscan companies and their agents into a meta-network of mutual aid and support based on trust and reputation. This system allowed individual companies such as Datini's access to a wider range of specific trade hubs across Europe and the Mediterranean, without the burden and risk of maintaining their own agents in each. A company's worth was directly related to the quality of its correspondents and its information capital, and so impressive levels of correspondence, both within and between companies, helped feed and police this informal system. The companies likewise cooperated in the sale and exchange of each other's goods, sharing account ledgers of transactions completed for others. Unlike the system of the Maghribi traders, as illustrated in the Cairo Geniza, agents received payments or commissions in exchange for their services, while remunerated brokers also acted as facilitators in long-distance trade agreements. This system thus allowed Francesco Datini to profit from trade with the Maghrib, despite restrictions on Florentine access to markets there.

Chapter 6 details the strategies that allowed Florentine merchants to trade across the Mediterranean. Without a port of their own (conquests and purchases in the later fifteenth century would remedy this to some extent), Florentine merchants were obligated to pass through ports such as Pisa, Genoa, or even Venice. As Michienzi explains, the choice of port could be determined by a number of factors, including political relations, transportation costs, and established contacts. Merchants also had to choose between shipping options, including routes, charters, and vessels, all of which affected potential profits. The Florentines were able to adapt to numerous obstacles by relying on contacts and resources from other, more established maritime powers. Michienzi insists on this adaptability and on the reticular responses developed by Datini as the basis for his success. The chapter includes an interesting discussion of piracy and ransoming, although it seems ill-placed and lost in the larger treatment of how Datini and his associates sought to compensate for infrastructural weaknesses.

The concluding chapter takes the reader through Datini's Majorcan contacts, who gave him access to the Maghrib. Catalan and Aragonese dominance of western Mediterranean trade, along with shallow Florentine roots in North African markets, forced Datini to develop alternative paths to Maghribi goods and clients. As described throughout the book, his strategy was to establish agents and contacts in Majorca, the "Mediterranean emporium." The Datini company was able to draw on contacts with extensive ties that combined to span the western Mediterranean trade routes. These included working relations with the merchant leagues that dominated Catalan trade, as well as individual agents. Indicative of Majorcan society and of Mediterranean trade more broadly, almost half of Datini's contacts in this area were either Jews or recent Christian converts. Valencia likewise served as a transfer point, and Datini agents worked closely with *Mudéjar* elites who served as intermediaries with Maghribi Muslims.

The Maghrib was certainly not the only region where Datini used intermediaries to conduct trade, but those employed in this case were different and led to the mobilization of larger and less homogenous networks. However, much of the study is spent on setting up this argument, explaining how Datini's other networks functioned, from northern Europe to the Tuscan countryside, how trade relations in general functioned in the Mediterranean, and on the factors that inhibited direct Florentine access to the Maghrib, rather than actually exploring the network of intermediaries that connected the Datini companies with North Africa. This is unfortunate, especially since the archival research exhibited clearly indicates possibilities for a more thorough treatment.

Michienzi's analysis is unfortunately hampered by its limited bibliography in both the questions asked and historiographical framework. Although the author refers often to the importance of informal ties, reputation, and trust, the work is devoid of any real discussion of the more recent and essential works on the topic, especially for the medieval Mediterranean. Avner Greif's *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy* (2006) is cited in passing, but without any real impact. The absence of more recent works, such as Jessica Goldberg's *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean* (2012), is understandable, but discussions concerning the use of legal enforcements by Maghribi traders have been circulating since at least 2008.[1] Thus, for example, although these networks did indeed form and operate for the most part outside any central authority, it no longer seems tenable to claim that the individuals involved in merchant networks had no recourse to any legitimate authority to ar-

bitrate in their disputes. The motivations for establishing this kind of informal network are evoked numerous times, along with the need for trust between actors, but, again, no reference is made to the large body of literature that explores reputation mechanisms and contract enforcement (a brief note on p. 276 citing two works hardly seems sufficient). Because of this, there is no meaningful discussion of these mechanisms, and they are taken for granted.

These problems seem to stem in part from a larger one: the limited scope of the bibliography in general. The majority of works are in either French or Italian, and almost all, even those in English, refer directly to late medieval Florence, Italy, and to a limited extent the Italian presence in the Mediterranean. Because of this, much of the book is limited to questions raised in a limited historiographical frame, and fails in part to seem relevant outside of this range. Many of the discussions seem parochial, limited to the field of medieval Florentine studies, and fail to place the author's research in the larger Mediterranean context it deserves. It would seem natural, for example, that a study of this size on medieval Mediterranean trade networks would make use of the considerable body of literature on the Jewish merchants of the Cairo Geniza, but Michienzi cites only the first volume of S. D. Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society* (1967). This absence is particularly felt in the treatment of new forms of solidarity and loyalty (pp. 60-84), in which the creation and maintenance of long-distance trade relationships built on reputation and trust, often via letters, by members of the Datini company requires comparison with the Geniza merchants.

Particularly frustrating for readers of H-MEM is perhaps the relatively little space given to intercultural relations. The author does readily explain that Datini was unable to establish direct trade relations with the Maghrib, but the treatment in chapter 3 of Florence's very limited commercial and diplomatic presence in the region is submerged in a much larger general presentation of the greater Italian presence there, as well as the Florentine diplomatic presence throughout Europe. The discussion from pp. 419-453 of Datini contacts with Jews on Majorca and *Mudéjars* in Valencia seems inadequate. This may be due to limits within Michienzi's archival sources, but the reference to Arabic- and Hebrew-literate agents working within the Datini company is frustratingly brief (pp. 419 and 451, with letters containing Arabic and Hebrew script from the Datini registers on p. 420). The modalities of this intercultural contact, and more importantly the creation of informal long-distance trade relations and the maintenance of trust and reputation across religious boundaries are only superficially addressed (pp. 448-452).

The book also suffers from what seems to have been a lack of editing between the dissertation from which it was drawn and the final manuscript. Many sections seem bloated by tangential discussions more useful for demonstrating a candidate's breadth of understanding than for advancing the monograph's argument. A more dynamic editorial touch might have helped avoid the many repetitions and better focused the light of the author's rather competent research. Certain chapters adding little to the core thesis, 3 for example, could have been eliminated or summarized into other chapters. This may have helped lend more force to the author's argument, and allowed for a more effective integration of the substantial archival research too often relegated to the footnotes.

Datini, Majorque et le Maghreb will prove useful for scholars of the late medieval western Mediterranean, especially those interested in Italian economic history. The unfortunate timing of the book's release, coming on the heels of recent studies, means that it seems slightly less relevant in terms of historical network theory or intercultural relations, but it does make valid contributions to both. The study is complemented by substantial appendices, including tables listing Datini agents and contacts, purchases of African goods, and most importantly the entire edited collection of letters in the Datini archives written from the Maghrib. As primary sources, these will no doubt facilitate research for those working on Italian-Maghribi trade relations, bolstered by Michienzi's substantial summary of French and Italian works.

Note

[1]. J. Edwards, S. Ogilvie, "Contract Enforcement, Institutions and Social Capital: The Maghribi Traders Reappraised," *CESifo Working Paper Series*, no. 2254 (March 2008). See also the subsequent articles in this debate: J. Edwards and S. Ogilvie, "Contract Enforcement, Institutions, and Social Capital: The Maghribi Traders Reappraised," *The Economic History Review* 65, no. 2 (2012): 421-44; and A. Greif, "The Maghribi Traders: A Reappraisal?," *The Economic History Review* 65, no. 2 (2012): 445-69. J. Goldberg's recent analysis of the subject is equally informative: "Choosing and Enforcing Business Relationships in the Eleventh-Century Mediterranean: Reassessing the 'Maghribi Traders'," *Past and Present* 216 (2013): 3-40.

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